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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the current status of standards and assessment in California, focusing on the system's successes and failures, and on how professors of educational administration can be involved and of assistance to administrators and teachers in this endeavor. At this time, the California accountability system and other mandated factors have put California school administrators into a state either of shock and fear, or full denial. To counteract the negative impact of these factors upon school administrators, the American Educational Research Association (AERA) proposes a set of conditions for policy, including protection against high-stakes decisions based on a single test, validation for each separate intended use of a high-stakes test, full disclosure of likely negative consequences of high-stakes testing, alignment between the test and curriculum, and opportunities for meaningful remediation for examinees who fail high-stakes tests. Professors of educational administration can provide practitioners with tools to assess and interpret assessments, and the knowledge of all current accountability mandates to present to school teachers, parents, and community. They can help them learn to approach and integrate curricular areas, and function as instructional leaders who can lead teaching faculty to do the same. (RT)

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Leadership and Accountability – The Role of Professors and Practitioners

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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Leadership and Accountability – The Role of Professors and Practitioners

This paper examines the current status of standards and assessment in California. Examples of standards and accountability systems in use or pending demonstrate the degree to which the content and process of curriculum and delivery are mandated and in some cases scripted for daily use. The focus for the school administrator has become more and more focused on improving student performance on the various assessments, and penalties for lack of progress are foreboding. It is imperative that professors of Educational Administration address accountability systems within the context of their programs and work with future and current administrators to provide assistance in managing and meeting the requirements of the accountability systems.

John Mockler, the past Executive Director of the State Board of Education (California) has admitted that the fast pace plus a lack of communication has left many educators, who must implement and assess the new standards, confused (California Student, 2001). Opponents conclude that assessment strategies driven by accountability often do little improve teaching and learning (Sirotnik, 2002). Some questions that need to be addressed in examining the current system of accountability include: 1) Shall we have in place systems that are judged by tests that are not yet piloted and not completely aligned with curriculum, simply to have scores reported at the determined time, taking valuable time from teachers/administrators in the delivery? 2) What alternatives need to be considered? These are significant questions for our profession. As we begin to

attempt to answer these questions, the role that both professors and practitioners can and must play will be examined.

The premise of an accountability system based on high-stakes testing is addressed by the American Educational Research Association (AERA) through a recent policy statement:

> Many states and school districts mandate testing programs to gather data about student achievement over time and to hold schools and students accountable. Certain uses of achievement test results are termed "high stakes" if they carry serious consequences for students or for educators. Schools may be judged according to the school-wide average scores of their students. High school-wide scores may bring public praise or financial rewards; low scores may bring public embarrassment or heavy sanctions. For individual students, high scores may bring a special diploma attesting to exceptional academic accomplishment; low scores may result in students being held back in grade or denied a high school diploma.
>
> These various high-stakes testing applications are enacted by policy makers with the intention of improving education. For example, it is hoped that setting high standards of achievement will inspire greater effort on the part of students, teachers, and educational administrators. Reporting of test results may also be beneficial in directing public attention to gross achievement disparities among schools or among student groups. However, if high stakes testing programs are implemented in circumstances where educational resources are inadequate or where tests lack sufficient reliability or validity for their intended purposes, there is potential for serious harm. Policy makers and the public may be misled by spurious test score increases unrelated to any fundamental educational improvement; students may be placed at increased risk of educational failure and dropping out; teachers may be blamed or punished for inequitable resources over which they have no control; and curriculum and instruction may be severely distorted if high test scores per se, rather than learning become the overriding goal of classroom instruction. (AERA Position Statement, 2002)

Those "in the know", the professional educators and professors of educational administration, have been "left out of the loop," in the decision-making and implementation phases of the high stakes testing programs in states throughout the United States, including California. The focus of this paper is on the current system in California, its successes and failures, and on exactly how

professors of educational administration can be involved and of assistance to the current and future administrators and teacher in this endeavor.

Accountability in California

Currently, the California accountability system is based totally on test scores: one nationally normed test, one to four state standards criterion referenced tests depending on the school year, and for high schools, the new graduation or 'exit' exam. This testing system, which is being put into place and will be changing each year over the next four to five years until fully in place, has spawned a whole new vocabulary. A school is judged on its growth/performance through specific determinations related directly to test outcomes. To say that the accountability system contains multiple elements and is extremely daunting would be to soft pedal a Herculean task that faces current administrators in the state.

The Academic Performance Accountability Act or APAA [originally California Senate Bill X1 of 1999] (CDE, Public Schools Accountability, 2002) uses test scores as the basis of calculating the *academic performance index* (API) which is based on a complex formula of how well students achieve on these tests. California schools are then ranked in 'deciles' on a bell curve, and schools in the bottom five or bottom half of all schools are declared to be 'underperforming'. Additionally, schools also have to show increases in their API each year or they are also classified as 'underperforming'. Being underperforming makes a school eligible for one of the intervention programs mandated by the state. Schools in intervention programs that do not make their API growth for two years in a row run the risk of heavy sanctions. In June, 2002, districts were hearing in assessment meetings that in the fall of 2002, some schools (up to 123 of the first group of

schools in the improvement plan did not meet their growth requirements) could be targeted for full takeover, which would mean taking the school out of the local school district, giving it to a county office of education, institute of higher education (IHE), or private company to manage, replacing the principal and possibly the teaching staff.

The current emphasis on accountability in the state of California accompanies a previous investment in school reform in the late 1990s, when the state adopted detailed academic content standards to guide classroom instruction (CDE, Content Standards, 2002). To say that California school administrators are living in a condition of shock and fear or full denial pretty well summarizes the situation.

For three years (1999, 2000, 2001), student percentile rankings on Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT 9) subtests were grouped in quintiles (e.g., how many students at a given school site scored between the 0 and 19th national percentile ranks in reading), and included a 'weighting value' for students in each quintile was figured. All values were then added together, and then multiplied by the value of each testing subject to determine the school's API. API scores range between 200 and 1000, with 800 being the current 'interim growth target'. Beginning in 2001, schools received a second API score, called the 'base' API for that year. The base API included for the first time, student results on the English Language Arts California Standards Test (ELA CST). This series of tests is based on the California ELA standards and is a criteria test. Here, student raw scores are divided again into quintiles called 'performance levels'. The levels are named: Advanced, Proficient, Basic, Below Basic, and Way Below Basic. The number of students hitting each level has become a major factor in calculating the 2001 Base API. In 2002, the Base API will include math standards test results. In 2003, science and history standards

results will be added to API calculations at some grade levels. Writing is tested at 4th and 7th grades, and will be an important component of the ELA scores in 2003.

High schools will have the new Exit Exam (CAHSEE – California High School Exit Exam) added to the API in 2002. A high school exit exam in language arts and mathematics was adopted in 1999, and about 78% of ninth graders took it voluntarily in spring 2001. California's new graduation or 'exit exam' takes effect with the Class of 2004, unless the State Board of Education decides to delay implementation for a year or two. The six-hour exam will be given three times a year at every high school in the state, on exact dates specified by the state. Students must pass each of two parts, and must keep taking the part(s) they did not pass until they do pass. They may try one last time to pass the exam in the late summer after they have graduated. Schools are required to track student test results, provide remediation programs after each test administration for students who do not pass, and inform parents of these programs. The exam tests English and math at present: The State Board has expressed the desire to add science and history in the future. The exam also includes several writing samples.

The APAA mentioned a number of things that could be included in the API, but there is at present in California no statewide data system to track some of these in a consistent manner. Nor, in fact, is there a data system to track student test scores state wide. Districts have to scramble to hire companies to produce achievement data for them. All the determinations of the API are made (according to the APAA) by the State Board of Education (SBE). The 'interim' growth API target of 800 was set, and State Board minutes occasionally reference the desire to raise this target in the future. The weighting value of students at each quintile, the raw score needed to hit each performance level on

any of the standards tests, and the raw scores needed to pass the Exit Exam, are all set by SBE, empowered to do so by the state legislature.

In addition, legislation has created two huge staff development programs. All K-8 teachers in California, about 170,000 in all, are required to complete a major program in the teaching of reading and math over the next three years, using the SBE selected reading and math programs. SBE selected two highly scripted reading programs for local districts to choose between (Open Court and Direct Instruction). Additional legislation requires that all principals and other site administrators in the state will be required to complete a staff development program also over a three year span. In this program they will learn about the SBE selected reading and math instructional materials mentioned above, and how to interpret and use the test score data to measure achievement growth. Organizations wishing to become trainers for either of these programs apply to SBE, providing materials down to and including most of the overhead transparencies or power point slides to be used in training, should the organization pass muster.

This current accountability system is additionally exacerbated by a new bill (AB 75), which will allow teachers to pass a test to become a principal – partially a result of the current lack of credentialed administrators in the state and possibly a realistic reflection of the increasing shortage yet to come as accountability comes fully on line.

Federal legislation and assessment in California

To add to this, in January of 2002, the federal *No Child Left Behind Act (Pub. L.N. 107-110)* which reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is a daunting addition to all practitioners. Principals who are not aware of these new rules and how they will affect principals and schools should become acquainted with

them. The 'No Child Left Behind' legislation both reinforces these potential sanctions and adds some additional rules. Ultimately, schools have to show increasing test score results. State accountability systems have come up to the new federal expectations (California may have to increase its requirements for yearly growth, for example) and schools that do not show growth will be sanctioned, first with having to use federal money to support transportation to other schools for parents who wish that, and ultimately facing staff replacements.

The legislation is huge; it contains more than 1000 pages on the website. The summary is well over 200 pages. The length by itself increases the level of difficulty for already overworked site administrators in understanding the specifics of the document. State departments of education are currently engaged in negotiations with the goal of clarifying and developing individual state responses to the legislation.

Basically, schools are required to bring all students to 'proficiency', defined roughly along the lines of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 12 years. This is to be defined by performance on tests at specified grade levels. At the same time, states will have to administer NAEP regularly, as NAEP results will have to show growth as well.

Schools must show an average of 8% growth in test scores each year (100% divided by 12 equals 8). This growth must be school wide AND for each specified group (poverty, race and ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency). Schools that do not make this growth two years in a row face sanctions, beginning with parental choice, allowing parents to select another school for their children, either inside or outside of their current school district. The sanctioned school would pay the cost of transportation

out of its federal funds, should this happen. Sanctions are extended for continued failure to make the required growth, and include the transfer of teaching faculty, replacement of the school's administration, full takeover of the school by a state agency or private company, and finally, closing the school.

The measure of success rests totally on tests, along with NAEP. For measurement of school success, multiple measures no longer exist.

Additionally, schools (as of the start of the school year in fall 2002) must hire only fully credentialed teachers for Title I classes. By the 2005-6 school year, all teachers at a Title I school site must by fully credentialed. Instructional aides must, within four years, have completed at least two years of college, and any new hires as of fall 2002 must meet that requirement. To exacerbate the problem, this comes at the same time as a shortage of teachers, whether fully credentialed or not.

The following list includes some of the more significant provisions that are required at the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year. Additional requirements related to accountability, testing, and a host of other issues will kick in after the 2002-2003 school year:

- New Title I teachers must be "highly qualified" as defined by ESEA, which means that each new Title I teacher must be state certified and pass a state test.
- School districts and states must work toward having all teachers highly qualified by the end of the 2005-06 school year and must submit annual reports on their progress.
- States and school districts must produce annual report cards of students' progress toward meeting state standards, graduation rates, names of schools that need improvement, qualifications of teachers, and percentages of students who were not tested.
- Schools previously identified as in the first year of school improvement (as defined by ESEA before the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act*) must begin mandatory public school choice.

- Schools previously identified as being in the second year of school improvement or corrective action (as defined by ESEA) will be required to provide public school choice and supplemental educational services (such as tutoring or after school programs.) (DeWitt, 2002, 1 & 9)

Beginning in the 2005-06 academic year, all schools in the United States will be required to test students annually in reading and math between grades 3 and 9, and at least once in grades 10 through 12. Under the law, states and the federal government are required to provide assistance to schools that are not performing, but failure to perform may eventually have ramifications for students and school staff members. In a worst-case scenario, those ramifications could include denial of a diploma; reconstitution of the school; or termination of staff and administration.

The U.S. Department of Education is charged with developing guidelines and regulations that further delineate how to apply the *No Child Left Behind Act* and clarifying legislative language in the law that is ambiguous or needs further explanation. The new law requires states and school districts to develop plans that indicate how the goals and requirements of the federal law are being met.

It is easy to see why current school administrators who, for the most part, have yet to see the federal legislation, feel overwhelmed—or live in a state of denial. Professors of Educational Administration can and should provide ideas, strategies, and approaches for the practitioners as they meet these daunting new challenges. Practitioners will need help in combining the demands for improved test scores with best instructional practices.

Accountability Report Card

All of these measures are confronting administrators in the schools of California. Additionally, accounting to the public through the vehicle known as the *School Accountability Report Card (SARC)* is one more task for all. This SARC has a checkered

past in terms of monitoring in the state. The SARC was first required during the 1989-90 school year. It, at that time, appeared generally to provide parents and other concerned parties with interesting and useful information about their local schools. At the same time, however, many appeared to provide little comparative information enabling evaluation of the relative achievement of students within and among schools. Often, the release of the document was for public relations – and essential facts were not forthcoming (any weaknesses as opposed to strengths).

In July of 1990 the California State Board of Education adopted the *Accountability Report Card* specifying 13 school conditions. In 1994, with AB 198, and in 1995, with SB 1664, these increased to 16 the number of specified conditions to be reported. They were as follows:

1. Student achievement in and progress toward meeting reading, writing, arithmetic, and other academic goals;
2. Progress toward reducing dropout rates;
3. Estimated expenditures per student and types of services funded;
4. Progress toward reducing class sizes and teaching loads'
5. Any assignment of teachers outside their subject areas of competence;
6. Quality and currency of textbooks and other instructional materials;
7. The availability of qualified personnel to provide counseling and other student support services;
8. Availability of qualified substitute teachers;
9. Safety, cleanliness, and adequacy of school facilities;
10. Adequacy of teacher evaluations and opportunities for professional improvement;
11. Classroom discipline and climate for learning;
12. Teacher and staff training, and curriculum improvement programs;
13. Quality of school instruction and leadership;
14. The degree to which students are prepared to enter the work force (applicable to high schools only);
15. The total number of instructional minutes offered in the school year, separately stated for each grade level, as compared to the total number of instructional minutes per school year required by law, separately stated for each grade level; and
16. The total number of minimum days in the school year, as specified in Sections 46112, 46113, 46117 and 46141 of the Education Code.

(CDE, School Accountability Report Card, 2002)

If the school is in a district operating more than one school, each of the following also must be included in the SARC:

1. Beginning, midrange, and highest annual teacher's salary;
2. Average school-site principal's annual salary;
3. District superintendent's annual salary;
4. Percentage of budget for teachers' salaries; and
5. Percentage of budget for administrative salaries.

To insure that the public (and particularly the parents of children in the schools) are aware of the specifics of a school site, in 1998 Governor Wilson signed two bills into law (AB 568 and AB 572) making major changes to the School Accountability Report Card. These became effective on January 1, 1998. The first (AB 568), required school districts connected to the Internet to make the information in the School Accountability Report Card accessible on the Internet by July 1, 1998. The second (AB 572) required that schools make an effort to notify parents of the purpose of the SARCs and ensure that all parents receive a copy of the report card. It also required that the most recent three years of data be provided in the areas of pupil achievement in reading, writing, arithmetic and other academic goals, dropout rates, progress towards reducing class sizes, number of credentialed teachers with emergency credentials, teachers working without credentials and teachers working outside their subject areas of competence, number of days of staff development, and suspension and expulsion rates.

AB 1632, Chaptered on 8/31/00, in the interest of consistency in schools across the state, added new data requirements effective 7/1/00, including:

- Adds additional assessments of school conditions
- Requires CDE to develop and recommend to the SBE for adoption of as standardized SARC template.
- Requires CDE to post the completed and viewable template on the Internet.
- Requires CDE to develop and recommend to the SBE for adoption, standardized definitions for the required data elements.

- Requires LEAs with access to the Internet to make their SARCs available on the Internet.
- Requires CDE to maintain links to the SARCs posted on the Internet.
- Requires schools to ensure that all parents receive a copy of the report card.

On February 21, 2002, AB 2558 was introduced, requiring the State Department of Education to develop and implement a system for collecting and reporting indicators from each public school. The resultant system would set forth criteria that would be required to be included in the reports, including information regarding school safety, pupil discipline, pupil performance, school staff, length of the school year, enrollment, average daily attendance, pupil dropouts, pupil-staff ratio, staff development days, school history, and school funding. The bill would require that the SDE issue a report card for each public school in the state that include an *academic performance* grade. To the extent the bill would impose additional requirements on school districts, it would impose a state-mandated local program (CDE, Bill Documents, 2002).

Finally, the imperative of proper submission and documentation is communicated in a recent EdCal (July 1, 2002), stating:

> School Administrators take heed: officials from the California Department of Education are hunting down schools that have not published their School Accountability Report Cards as required by law . . . In past years, districts that failed to publish their SARCs were hardly noticed by state officials. But now, the CDE is required to monitor and enforce the regulation, in the wake of Senate Bill 1632, Poochigian, R- Fresno, which was signed into law by Gov Gray Davis last year. (State Increasingly Monitoring, p.2)

Conclusion

The AERA policy statement sets forth a set of conditions essential to sound implementation of high-stakes educational testing programs. They are as follows:

1. Protection Against High-Stakes Decisions Based on a Single Test.

As a minimum assurance of fairness, when tests are used as part of making high-stakes decisions for individual students such as promotion to the next grade or high school graduation, students must be afforded multiple opportunities to pass the test. More importantly, when there is credible evidence that a test score may not adequately reflect a student's true proficiency, alternative acceptable means should be provided by which to demonstrate attainment of the tested standards.

2. Adequate Resources and Opportunity to Learn.
   When testing is used for individual student accountability or certification, students must have had a meaningful opportunity to learn the tested content and cognitive processes. Thus, it must be demonstrated that the tested content has been incorporated into the curriculum, and that materials and instruction of students are provided before high-stakes consequences are imposed for failing examinations.
3. Validation for each Separate Intended Use.
   Each separate use of a high-stakes test, for individual certification, for school evaluation, for curricular improvement, for increasing student motivation, or for other uses requires a separate evaluation of the strengths and limitations of both the testing program and the test itself.
4. Full Disclosure of Likely Negative Consequences of High-Stakes Testing Programs. When credible scientific evidence suggests that a given type of testing program is likely to have negative side effects, test developers and users should make a serious effort to explain these possible effects to policy makers.
5. Alignment Between the Test and the Curriculum
   When testing is for school accountability or to influence the curriculum, the test should be aligned with the curriculum as set forth in standards documents representing intended goals of instruction. Multiple test forms should be used or new test forms should be introduced on a regular basis, to avoid a narrowing of the curriculum toward just the content sampled on a particular form.
6. Validity of Passing Scores and Achievement Levels.
   When testing programs use specific scores to determine "passing: or to define reporting categories like "proficient" the validity of these specific scores must be established in addition to demonstrating the representativeness of the test content. To begin with, the purpose and meaning of passing scores or achievement levels must be clearly stated. Once the purpose is clearly established, sound and appropriate procedures must be followed in setting passing scores or proficiency levels.
7. Opportunities for Meaningful Remediation for Examinees Who Fail High Stakes Tests.
8. Appropriate Attention to Language Difference Among Examinees.
   Special accommodations for English language learners may be necessary to Obtain valid scores.
9. Appropriate Attention to Students with Disabilities.

10. Careful Adherence to Explicit Rules for Determining Which Students Are to be tested. When schools, districts, or other administrative units are compared to one another or when changes in scores are tracked over time, there must be explicit policies specifying which students are to be tested and under which circumstances students may be exempted from testing. Such policies need to be uniformly enforced to assure the validity of score comparison. In addition, reporting of test score results should accurately portray the percentage of students exempted.
11. Sufficient Reliability for Each Intended Use. Reliability refers to the accuracy or precision of test scores. It must be shown that scores reported to individuals or for schools are sufficiently accurate to support each intended interpretation. Accuracy should be examined for the scores actually used. For example, information about the reliability of raw scores may not adequately describe the accuracy of percentiles; information about the reliability of school means may be insufficient if scores for subgroups are also used in reaching decisions about schools.
12. Ongoing Evaluation of Intended and Unintended Effects of High-Stakes Testing. With any high-stakes testing program, ongoing evaluation of both intended and unintended consequences is essential. In most cases, the governmental body that mandates the test should also provide resources for a continuing program of research and for dissemination of research findings concerning both the positive and negative effects of the testing program. (AERA Position Statement, 2000)

Many of the areas enumerated through the policy statement, especially those indicants of validity, are not currently addressed by the system in place in the state of California.

Those individuals responsible for the teaching and of the standards, which are required, have simply not been a part of this far-reaching assessment and accountability system. A recent student of Educational Administration cites complaints, fears and suggestions for the future, stating:

> The major change in assessment is the alignment to the state standards. The entire education system in California is geared to make sure students are all being educated according to the same guidelines. The complaints I hear from teachers is the abundance of assessments without knowledge of how the results are used and to what purpose. Teachers want to be in the communication loop so that they feel part of the decision-making process and that their hard work counts! If assessment results are not used effectively, the system seems like it is spinning its wheels. Within my school, my district, and the county, policies seem to be implemented and interpreted in many different ways. There is an accountability issue that

> concerns me. There is a definite need to improve the utilization of assessment systems and communication at all levels.
>
> If I were to develop a plan to alter the existing inefficiencies, I would first set up a schematic diagram of the process. This plan would include: the name of the assessment, why it is required, how the information will be utilized, and a reporting procedure for communication to all district personnel and parents. Secondly, I would design strategies with the leadership team that teachers could use for student/parent accountability as they are promoted from one grade level to the next. This would include a checklist of what the student understands and need more help with, accompanied by key artifacts.
>
> Assessments must be purposeful, useful and communicated to everyone with a stake in the education of students. If we team up – we can move mountains. (Edwards, D., personal communication)

How do we move those mountains? Professors of educational administration can provide practitioners with several kinds of assistance. State legislatures and Congress have mandated accountability based on test scores, and whatever else practitioners do, the numbers have to go up if they hope to survive as a school. Professors also need to design and undertake research projects that demonstrate the connections between active learning and higher test scores. A knowledge base needs to be provided that practitioners can utilize that pinpoints open ended, problem based, project based, and higher level thinking and learning as part of a focused program to raise test scores. Help needs to be provided to practitioners by professors of educational administration to keep those at the school sites from being overwhelmed, and to help them to not fall prey to those who recommend—and usually sell—narrowly focused test preparation materials. Practitioners also require assistance in functioning as instructional leaders who have the skills to align state and national standards to higher levels of instruction and curriculum. One major strategy that could be suggested would be to create content standards based learning units that generalize and integrate across two or

more content areas. In conclusion, the task of professors is immense; it matches the task of current practitioners in the field. Professors need to provide future administrators with the tools to assess, interpret assessments, and the knowledge of all current accountability mandates to present the information to the teachers, the parents, and the community in the best interest of the students of the school. The goals of higher education and K-12 are the same in this interest, to educate. Professors of educational administration can help practitioners, and prospective practitioners, learn to approach and integrate curricular areas, and to function as instructional leaders who can lead teaching faculty to do the same. This is an imperative – we are accountable.

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